

Testimony of Jessica Stewart
Middletown School Readiness/Discovery Council
Before the Education Committee (SB No. 942)

(February 25, 2015)

Senator Looney, Senator Duff, Representative Sharkey, Representative Aresimowicz, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jessica Stewart and I am the School Readiness Coordinator for Middletown, overseeing the programs with State funds currently serving approximately 450 children birth to age five. I want to thank you for supporting the continued funding of Family Resource Centers, State Funded early care programs, as well as Care4Kids.

I am testifying today about the need to reinstate funding for the Parent Trust Fund, Help Me Grow, School Age Programming at State Funded Centers, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Family School Connection, as well as Early Literacy Grant. All of these programs benefit thousands of families throughout Connecticut. These programs work to help connect families with services needed to ensure their basic needs are being met, teach parents to value education and support their children, provide quality services to keep parents employed and much more.

Many of these services work toward identifying children early and connecting them with services to help eliminate the need for services upon entry to school, or greatly diminish the services thus saving special education costs.

The Early Literacy Grant helps provide Raising Readers programs to families with children birth through 8 eight, even bilingual families which in turn strengthens the language and reading skills of both children and their parents, most of this is done prior to the entry of school which leads to better reading scores for children and empowerment for parents.

Why does the budget include an increase in funds in the amount of \$16.4 million dollars for Charter and Magnet school funding? Those funds need to be spent from birth to age 8 to ensure children succeed in school and life. Early Care and Educations teachers are being required as of July 1, 2015 to hold a bachelor's degree, but we can't pay them more than \$14 per hour, please think about using some of the \$16.4 million to restore cut funds to the essential programs as well as increase the State Funded Early Care Reimbursement rate so programs begin paying Bachelor degree teachers a salary commensurate with public school teachers.

Thank you
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